

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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R 181457Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1896

DIA WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 15094

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MASS LE IS

SUBJECT: CONTROVERSY OVER LEBANESE DEFENSE POLICY

REF: BEIRUT 15001

SUMMARY: GOL APPEARS TO BE TRYING ITS BEST TO WITHSTAND DOMESTIC PRESSURES FOR SOVIET MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND ANY FORM OF ARAB MILITARY PRESENCE IN LEBANON IN AFTERMATH OF LAST WEEK'S ISRAELI RAID ON BEIRUT. END SUMMARY.

1. LIKELIHOOD OF GOL SEEKING SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES FROM USSR APPEARED TO DIMINISH DEC. 17, WHEN PRIMIN SOLH, FON MIN TAQLA AND DEFMIN SKAFF REVIEWED LEBANON'S DEFENSE POSTURE AND MILITARY NEEDS AT TWO JOINT SESSIONS OF PARLIAMENTARY DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEES. HAVING BEEN QUOTED AS STATING LATE DEC. 16 THAT GOL WOULD RPT WOULD PURCHASE SOVIET SAM'S IF PARLIAMENT SO REQUESTED,

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SOLH DENIED TO DEPUTIES THAT HE HAD SAID ANY SUCH THING.

WHILE ADMITTING THAT LEBANESE ARMY'S EQUIPMENT WAS "INSUFFICIENT" TO ENSURE ADEQUATE DEFENSE AGAINST ISRAELI ATTACKS, HE TOLD THEM GOL HAD ALREADY REQUESTED URGENT DELIVERIES OF "A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT" FROM UNSPECIFIED ARAB COUNTRIES. LATTER, HE WAS CONVINCED, COULD BE COUNTED ON TO RESPOND PROMPTLY. (ACCORDING TO FONMIN TAQLA, ONLY ONE ARAB GOVT-- PROBABLY EITHER SYRIA OR KUWAIT--HAS SO FAR OFFERED ANY ASSISTANCE, WHICH HE TERMED "SMALL".) SOLH ALSO ASSURED DEPUTIES THAT GOL WAS READYING COMPREHENSIVE DEFENSE PLAN WHOSE IMPLEMENTATION OVER PERIOD OF "MANY MONTHS" WOULD BE BEYOND LEBANON'S ABILITY TO FINANCE AND WOULD THEREFORE REQUIRE GOL TO FIND "NEW SOURCES OF FINANCING". HE ALSO PROMISED THAT LONG-AWAITED DRAFT BILL PROVIDING FOR MILITARY CONSCRIPTION WOULD BE SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT IN NEAR FUTURE.

2. PRIMIN'S EXPOSITION REPORTEDLY DID NOT SIT WELL WITH MANY DEPUTIES, PARTICULARLY THOSE (E.G., FORMER PRIMIN SAEB SALAN) WHO PROFESS DESIRE FOR EARLIEST POSSIBLE ACQUISITION OF SAM'S. OTHERS, INCLUDING FORMER DEFMIN MAALOUF, POINTED OUT THAT GOL HAD ALREADY REQUESTED MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND/OR FUNDS FOR LEBANON'S DEFENSE FROM ARAB GOVT'S AT LAST SUMMER'S ARAB DEFENSE COUNCIL MEETINGS IN CAIRO, BUT THAT DESPITE MANY PROMISES, NOTHING HAD EVER MATERIALIZED. FOLLOWING AFTERNOON JOINT-COMMITTEE SESSION, PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER ASSAD ANNOUNCED THAT IN RESPONSE TO PARLIAMENTARY ADVICE GOL HAD AGREED TO SOUND OUT OTHER ARAB GOVT'S RE POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING "PLENARY INTER-ARAB CONFERENCE FOR PURPOSE OF DEFINING THEIR COMMON RESPONSIBILITIES VIS-AVIS LEBANON".

3. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT PRIMIN SOLH WAS QUOTED ACCURATELY ON DEC. 16 AND THAT HIS SUBSEQUENT DISAVOWAL OF HIS REMARK WAS MADE UNDER ORDERS FROM PRES. FRANGIE. WOULD THEREFORE APPEAR THAT WHILE PRESSURES FOR SOVIET MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND EXTERNAL ARAB SUPPORT REMAIN ALIVE IN POLITICAL CIRCLES HERE, GOL IS DOING ITS BEST -- ALBEIT WITH SOME CONFUSION AND BACK-TRACKING -- TO KEEP MATTERS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND. IN MEANTIME, IT DOUBTLESS WILL CONTINUE TRY PROJECT APPEARANCE OF ACTIVITY AIMED AT IMPROVING LEBANON'S DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL (E.G., FURTHER CONTACTS WITH ARAB GOVT'S MENTIONED ABOVE), HOPING AT SAME

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TIME TO AVOID HAVING TO COMMIT ITSELF TO ANY SPECIFIC COURSE OF ACTION.

4. FEDAYEEN, OF COURSE, ARE BUSY SEEING TO THEIR OWN DEFENSES. WE HAVE REPORT FROM RELIABLE LEBANESE ARMY SOURCE THAT ARMY ROADBLOCK ON MAIN BEIRUT-DAMASCUS ROAD NIGHT OF DEC. 16-17 STOPPED FEDAYEEN TRUCK BRINGING ADDITIONAL SAM-7'S TO BEIRUT CAMPS FROM SYRIA. WHEN REFUSED PERMISSION TO PROCEED,

TRUCK APPARENTLY RETURNED TO SYRIA (WHERE FEDAYEEN PRESUMABLY
WILL SEND ITS CONTENTS BACK INTO LEBANON BY SOME LESS-VISIBLE
ROUTE).
HOUGHTON

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